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THE LATE MISS JULIA THOMAS:

Died at Singapore,

July 27th, 1899.

THE BIBLE HOUSE:
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BIBLEWOMEN IN THE EAST.

A Section of the Annual Report

of the

British and Foreign Bible Society

for the Year 1898-9.

[EXPANDED.]

This pamphlet illustrates the work done in Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Mauritius, India, Ceylon, Straits Settlements, China, Korea, and Japan, by 552 Native Christian Biblewomen, supported by the Society's grants, who teach women to read the Holy Scriptures in their own vernaculars, and induce them to buy Bibles, Testaments, or Portions for themselves.

THE LATE MISS JULIA THOMAS, OF SINGAPORE.

IN February, 1897, a letter was received at the Bible House from Miss Hedley, who presides with so much devotion and success over the Y.W.C.A. Testing and Training Home for Foreign Missions, in Chelsea. The Committee had, in the previous December, accepted the services of Miss Caroline Dyke, from the same Home, to proceed to Singapore to succeed Miss Leader as the Society's Biblewoman among the Malay women there. Miss Hedley wrote to enquire whether the Committee would send a second worker to Singapore, as she had one whom she could very highly recommend for unusual Bible knowledge and steadfast and consistent character. This was Miss Julia Thomas.

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In answer to a request for a short account of her life, Miss Thomas wrote :—" My mother died before I was ten years of age. She had taught me much about the Lord, and I loved to hear about Him. But it was not till I was fourteen years old that I had assurance of salvation. I heard Mr. Moody preach from John iii. 36, especially dwelling on the word *hath*. The Spirit of God enabled me to lay hold of eternal life. At first it was with a very feeble grasp, but it soon became full assurance of faith. A few months afterwards I had the great joy of leading a little cousin to the Lord. For nearly twenty years I have lived with Mrs. C. As soon as I was old enough, I became nursery governess to her children, and the Lord graciously used me to lead six of those dear children to Himself. I had a class at the Stockwell Orphanage Sunday-school for six years, and I had the joy of seeing many of my girls put their trust in the Lord Jesus as their personal Saviour. For years I have had a great longing to work for God in the Foreign field, but Mrs. C. was not willing to part with me. She always said she could not do without

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me, and that I had a work to do for God in her home. So I stayed on, asking Him to make her willing at the right time ; and He has done so. My father died five years ago, and so I have no home ties whatever. I came into the Y.W.C.A. Training Home in September, 1896."

In another letter Miss Thomas stated that her education had been of an elementary character. Mrs. C.'s children had remained under her care till they were ten or twelve years of age. Two doctors certified sound health and constitution, though one remarked that her age was thirty-five, and it might have been better if she had been a few years younger for first going to the East.

Mrs. C.'s testimonial, after twenty years' experience of Miss Thomas as a resident in her house, said that she had been most patient and loving to the children, and that, in addition to leading several of the children to Christ, she had been much blessed to several maids in the house, and at the Sunday-school. Mrs. C. added—"She is a person of deep spiritual convictions, and her love to the Saviour would, I believe, make her willing to do or suffer any-

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thing for His sake. She cannot speak any foreign language, but no doubt would soon be able to learn one. During the whole period she was with me her health was excellent."

In March, 1897, Miss Thomas was accepted by the Committee as a second Biblewoman for Malaysia. Upon this Miss Hedley wrote: "I trust and believe Miss Thomas will be much blessed in the work, and I look forward with much joy to her going out under your Society." She sailed on September 23, 1897, in company with Mr. Chapman, who was returning to Malaysia married.

At the close of 1898, the Rev. H. F. Miller, then Acting-Agent for Malaysia, intimated that Miss Thomas had been very unwell, and a week's rest at Johore, on the mainland, had done her so little good that she must go away again. On March 9, 1899, he wrote: "I regret to say that Miss Thomas is no better. I am very anxious about her as she seems very frail. I have accepted an invitation from Mr. Lea for her, and she left for Batavia, Java, this week. She must stay away for six weeks or two months to thoroughly recuperate. She may

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be able to do some Bible work there later on." On April 2, Miss Thomas wrote from Depok, Java: "I want to thank the Committee for their great kindness in making it possible for me to have this rest and change. I am thankful to say that I have not been really ill, and I do not consider that the Singapore climate has served me at all badly. I was sorry to leave my loved work and am already anxious to return to it. It is such a privilege to take the Word of God to Malay women. In some cases they welcome us gladly, and listen most attentively to the reading of portions of Scripture, and my heart has often rejoiced when I have seen tokens of the Holy Spirit's work in their hearts. Tears have filled the eyes of one and another as they have listened to the story of God's wonderful love. Sometimes, of course, we meet with opposition. We have doors shut in our faces, etc. But one can only feel sorry for the poor Muhammadans, and rejoice in being permitted in some small measure to share the reproach of Christ. Again thanking the Committee for their great generosity, and still more for the privilege of working in the

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Mission field at all, and trusting that shortly I shall be able to return to my work quite strong and well, I remain, Yours faithfully, Julia Thomas."

On July 4th, Mr. Haffenden wrote: "Miss Thomas has received very much benefit from her trip to Java, and is now fully at work again. She is a splendid woman, and I trust that she may be with us many years." On July 20th, he wrote: "The day before yesterday I received a note from Miss Thomas, telling me that she had not been able to attend our regular Monthly Workers' Prayer Meeting, but not saying that she was seriously ill. This morning Mrs. Miller telephoned that the doctor who is attending her said that, though not dangerously, she was very seriously ill, and would want very careful nursing, and desired that she should have a European nurse. I then went to Mrs. Miller's, and she said that it was her wish to take Miss Thomas to be with her, and, as the house is a large one, it is possible for her to do so. It is very kind of her, as, of course, it will put her to considerable trouble. Mrs. Miller is very fond of Miss

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Thomas, as indeed all are who know her. At Mrs. Miller's request I have ordered a carriage suited to an invalid, and in it she and the nurse will take Miss Thomas to Mrs. Miller's house this evening when it is cool. I trust that Miss Thomas may be all right again before very long. I am afraid that she came back from Java too soon, but she is so devoted to her work that it is very difficult to keep her from it. It is very trying work." A postscript next day reports that Miss Thomas had been safely and comfortably moved, and that the doctor considered her decidedly better.

On July 27th, however, Mr. Haffenden sent a brief note to say that Miss Thomas had passed away that day a little before one o'clock. He adds that the Society had lost in her one of its most valuable workers.

The following letter of July 29th from Mrs. Miller describes the closing week :—"As it was my privilege to have Miss Thomas in my house during the last week of her life, I write to tell you about it. In November last year we first became a little anxious about her. She did not complain at all, but seemed always tired,

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and we were glad for her to go to Johore. She only stayed a week, not wanting to be away from her work. She seemed a little better, and went on till about February this year, when some friends invited her to our Singapore sea-side. She was quite pleased, saying, 'There are some Malays there that I can visit, so I shall not be neglecting my work.' At the end of the fortnight she came and stayed with me. She did not seem very well, but still went on with her work. She did not seem happy if she was not able to go to it. She loved her work and the poor Malay women whom she came to teach. Later on she did not seem altogether willing to go to Java, not thinking it necessary. But two days before she sailed she said, 'I think it is really just the right time now, for I feel I cannot go on.' Mr. Lea met her at Batavia, and took her to his house. Her first letter seemed brighter, and she said she was feeling better already, and that Mrs. Lea was very kind to her. From that she went to the hills; but she did not wish to stay away more than a month, as she wanted to be in Singapore to welcome Mr. and Mrs. Haffenden back from Europe.

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However, Mr. Miller persuaded her to stay for two months. She seemed better on her return, but in a few days still appeared to be tired. She hoped to outgrow the tired feeling, believing it was caused by the heat. Soon after her return from Java she caught a severe cold, and had hardly recovered from it when her last illness set in. Even then she tried to go out, and did not give up until quite unable to go.

“The first two weeks of this illness were spent at the Deaconesses’ Home, and it was with Miss Benjafield that she had her last long conversations. Miss B.’s sister had died about two months ago, and they often talked about her, and Miss Thomas said, ‘I think I shall know your sister when I get to heaven.’ When she came to me she was too weak to talk or even to listen. She kept her *Daily Light* under her pillow until the 25th. Then she could not read, but the nurse read to her every day. She brought her own sweet influence into my house, and though she was so weak her last few days were a blessed lesson of what Jesus could be to those who love Him. She was so gentle, and when we were fanning her, she

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said, 'Now I shall go to sleep.' This was simply because she did not want to weary us. When suffering great pain, she never made one impatient gesture, and on Sunday night I said to her, 'Mr. Haffenden asked me if you are dull.' She replied, 'Tell him I am very happy and very contented, but I am too weak to be bright. I have often sung, *Gladly will I toil and suffer*, and now I have the suffering. I am bearing it for Him.' She seemed glad to do His will. This was the last talk I had with her. After that it was simply a word and a smile, but she was most patient. On Thursday morning she had slight delirium, and in it she seemed to be giving an address or teaching her Sunday-school class. It was on 'Kept by the power of God through Christ unto salvation.' She seemed to be trying to make her hearers understand, for she said, 'If you could only grasp it—oh, if you could only grasp it!' Then, as time went on, she seemed to be 'praying.' The words were, 'My Lord and my God,' repeated over and over again. Then she got weaker and weaker till, at one o'clock, she fell asleep in Jesus. I cannot say how very thank-

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ful I am that I was allowed to have her with me. It was a privilege that I feel I am not worthy of, and yet it was given me. Of her life here I can only say that it was one which was full of love reflected from her Master, whom she dearly loved to serve. I once asked, 'What is your chief aim in life?' Her answer was, 'My object in life is to serve Christ and to be a soul-winner.'"

On August 3rd, Mr. Haffenden wrote: "I arranged for as simple a funeral as possible. It was all that could be wished for a Bible Society funeral, for, although there was so very little time to get out the notices, there was a very considerable attendance of the Christian workers and members from all the Churches. The service was conducted by the Revs. F. H. Morgan, W. G. Shellabear, and S. S. Walker. Miss Thomas had made friends everywhere; and this is not astonishing, for certainly hers was one of the most beautiful Christian characters that I have ever known. May the Society have many more like her!"

It has sometimes been urged that in sending out Biblewomen to such a place as Singapore

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the Committee should seek candidates from higher grades of Christian society than those whose services it has hitherto accepted. "How," it is asked, "can persons whose education at home has been but slight be expected to acquire a difficult foreign language, and become fitted to work among such women as the Malay Muhammadans?" The case of Miss Thomas has been given at length to show what influence for good such Biblewomen may exert, even though their period of work may be as brief as hers. In the recently-issued Annual Report (p. 239) their work is described as very trying, because it must be conducted in the greatest heat of the day if the native women are to be found disengaged. In spite of this trying feature, and of many scoffs at first, the Biblewomen have persevered, sometimes getting admittance into a few houses in each village, at others reading the Scriptures or singing hymns in a shed or under a tree to those who cared to listen. They have thus won their way, and are now welcomed into the houses, people calling after them, not to mock, but to invite them to enter their homes to

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read. Often they find mats spread for them, and neighbours gathered together to hear them. Last year, Miss Dyke and Miss Thomas *sold* among these women 175 copies of Malay Gospels in Arabic characters. This speaks volumes as to their influence. The male agents cannot do such work.

Three more Biblewomen—Miss Blundell, Miss Fairburn, and Miss Lloyd—start for Singapore, on October 6th, to continue and extend the work so well begun by Miss Dyke and Miss Thomas. Let much prayer be made on their behalf, that the same blessing may accompany all their labours which has so unmistakably attended those of the late Miss Thomas!

J. S.

October, 1899.

